

April 1, 1981

If I were a member of this Council, I would be interested to hear, now and then, what citizens think about their government. I speak only for myself, and perhaps, one other.

Seven years ago, a message was sent by first class mail, to more than half of the registered voters in the North Ward. Part of the message was that the City of Newark is fighting for survival; that its governmental operations had become a joke; that Federal and State governments had lost confidence in the ability of the City to govern itself effectively and make efficient use of Federal and State grants.

Now, after seven years, the operation of the City has advanced from a joke to a full-fledged comic opera. I give you some portions of the libretto.

According to the local press several weeks ago, the City fails to collect some millions of dollars in rent from tenants in City-owned properties, and the City does not even know exactly what properties it does own. Any comments on this situation from a department head, from the Business Administrator, from the Chief Executive, from any responsible source? None.

According to the local press, the Newark Housing Authority owes the City some millions of dollars for water consumption. Any comment from the Executive Director of the Authority, from the Chair-person of the Authority, from the Business Administrator of the City or its Chief Executive? None. After all, what is a few million dollars among friends?

Newark has had a succession of Business Administrators during these seven years, two lawyers and a carpenter, all three honorable men, proficient in their respective profession and vocation. However, none shows in education, training or experience, those qualifications necessary to perform the duties and discharge the responsibilities of Business Administrator. Disregarding this lack, this Council, the chorus line of the opera, approved these three appointments on the grounds that they were in the best interest of the City.

According to the local press, a proposed low and middle income housing project will contain apartments with three, four, and five bedrooms. The Chairwoman of the Board of Commissioners of the Housing Authority states, quote, "Five bedroom apartments are desperately needed in Newark," unquote. I do not know the source of her information or how accurate it is, but I do know that I will not willingly consent to subsidize the living quarters of anyone who wants a four or five bedroom apartment. Providing such apartments is tantamount to encouraging the practice of two or even three families occupying quarters intended for one family, or of tenants using them as rooming houses.

The clown, the fall guy, in this entire production is, of course, the citizen taxpayer. Time does not permit recital of many other equally entertaining portions of this libretto. But the curtain will not come down on this comic opera until the stage collapses. The stage is the once great City of Newark.

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